



Security Council

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Letter dated 26 February 2024 from the Permanent Representatives of Sierra Leone, Switzerland and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Sierra Leone and Switzerland, as Co-Chairs of the Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security of the Security Council, and in close cooperation with the United Kingdom, would like to share a summary note of the following meeting of the Informal Expert Group on the situation in the Sudan (see annex).

We would be grateful if the present letter and its annex could be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

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Permanent Representative of Sierra Leone to the United Nations

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Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom to the United Nations



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Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security of the Security Council

Summary of the meeting on the situation in the Sudan held on 26 January 2024

On 26 January 2024, the Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security convened a meeting on the situation in the Sudan. The members heard a briefing by the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General for the Sudan, Officer-in-Charge of the United Nations Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in the Sudan (UNITAMS) and United Nations Resident Coordinator and Humanitarian Coordinator in the Sudan, Clementine Nkweta-Salami. The meeting concluded with an overview of key recommendations provided by the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) and additional observations on conflict-related sexual violence shared by the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Pramila Patten.

Questions from Council members

Members of the Security Council asked questions relating to the termination of the mandate of UNITAMS and its impact on Sudanese women and girls, including with regard to reporting and documentation of atrocities and conflict-related sexual violence and support for the survivors of sexual and gender-based violence and for the participation of women in political processes and peace negotiations. Several members raised questions about what was being done or could be done to address and prevent conflict-related sexual violence and support subregional coordination in this regard, as well as how the United Nations country team would work with the independent international fact-finding mission for the Sudan. There were also multiple questions relating to the participation of women in ceasefire negotiations and diplomatic initiatives and talks between the Sudanese Government and the Rapid Support Forces, as well as within the Sudanese Coordination of Civil Democratic Forces (Taquadum), and how the international community could support the participation of women in these processes. Council members asked about how to ensure that the women and peace and security agenda is central to the mandate of the Personal Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Sudan, Ramtane Lamamra, and enquired about dedicated gender expertise to support the mandate of the Personal Envoy. Finally, some members raised questions about long-term flexible funding for women's organizations and the support provided for community-led groups in providing humanitarian assistance.

Main points raised in the meeting

Humanitarian crisis

- Since the outbreak of war in April 2023, the Sudan has been facing a humanitarian crisis. Half of the population of the Sudan, or 25 million people – of whom about 6.5 million are women and 14 million are children – need humanitarian assistance. The conflict has turned the Sudan into the largest displacement crisis globally. About 7.6 million people, accounting for approximately 15 per cent of the total population, have fled their homes since the beginning of the conflict.

- The war is having a devastating impact on Sudanese women and girls. The ongoing insecurity has an impact not only on women's physical safety, but also on the income of their families, as they do not have access to farms, markets or other public spaces. With the destruction of health-care facilities, Sudanese women and girls have almost no access to health care, including for sexual and reproductive health. Approximately 167,000 pregnant internally displaced women will need reproductive health services in 2024, and there is an urgent need for psychosocial support services.

Women's participation in humanitarian assistance and diplomatic efforts

- The United Nations country team has worked with local partners, including women-led organizations, to help reach 5.2 million people with life-saving assistance since the outbreak of the war. Women-led organizations and women's groups are providing urgent humanitarian assistance, using their grass-roots networks to gain access to hard-to-reach areas, distributing and facilitating access to medical supplies and providing emergency shelter for displaced women. More financial support, including flexible support for women-led organizations, is required in order to meet the growing needs. The 2024 humanitarian needs and response plan for the Sudan is only 41 per cent funded.
- Women remain underrepresented in diplomatic initiatives at the regional and international levels. No women have participated in the peace talks held in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia or in ceasefire negotiations. The participation of women in the Taqaddum is less than 15 per cent. Women's voices were also not sufficiently included in the Darfur Permanent Ceasefire Committee. It is critical for the international community to maintain pressure on the parties to include women in all diplomatic initiatives so as to resolve the conflict and to integrate gender considerations in the negotiations.
- Despite being excluded from the diplomatic initiatives and facing targeted attacks, such as arrests and detention for their activism and political engagement, Sudanese women have mobilized dozens of women-led anti-war initiatives; engaged in protests in the Sudan; and issued more than 90 public statements calling for an immediate ceasefire, for parties to resume dialogue, for the protection of civilians, with a focus on women and girls, and for access and delivery of humanitarian assistance. UNITAMS, UN-Women and the United Nations Development Programme have supported these initiatives since the outbreak of the war.
- Before the outbreak of the war, the United Nations had supported the first-ever stand-alone women's rights negotiating delegation, the presence of gender observers in negotiations with the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North Al-Hilu faction, the integration of gender equality provisions in negotiating documents and support for coalition-building and joint activism between women's groups across the Sudan on key political issues facing the country over the previous three years.

Conflict-related sexual violence

- Disturbing reports of conflict-related sexual violence have emerged in Khartoum since the beginning of the hostilities, implicating all parties to the conflict, in particular elements of the Rapid Support Forces and affiliated militia. The conflict has spread to other parts of the country, including the Darfur and the Kordofan regions, and there have been reports of widespread use of sexual violence to subjugate women and girls and punish specific communities,

with most of them attributed to members of the Rapid Support Forces and their allied militia.

- As of December 2023, the United Nations has documented 118 cases of conflict-related sexual violence, including rape, gang rape, attempted rape, abduction and trafficking, against 98 women, 18 girls, 1 man and 1 boy, attributed primarily to elements of the Rapid Support Forces. This number represents a 71 per cent increase in comparison with 2022. It is estimated that cases are severely underreported due to insecurity, lack of confidence in police and justice institutions, social stigma and fear of reprisals.
- Women and girls continue to face heightened risks of sexual violence in their homes or while fleeing to safer locations. In some cases, there have been indications of an ethnic dimension to sexual violence against women and girls, where non-Arab women have been targeted, particularly in West Darfur. In Khartoum, Arab women and girls, as well as Ethiopian and South Sudanese women and girls, have also been targeted.
- The United Nations has also received credible information on the abduction of over 160 women and girls for the purpose of sexual slavery. Reports indicate that women and girls abducted in Khartoum were taken to other parts of the Sudan, notably the Darfur region. In almost all cases, elements of the Rapid Support Forces or allied Arab militia were implicated. Some women and girls have been reportedly forced into prostitution or marriage, while, in other cases, families have paid significant ransoms for the return of their family members.
- The Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict has engaged with both warring parties. In July 2023, She sent official communications to the leadership of the Rapid Support Forces and the Sudanese Armed Forces calling on the parties to take immediate measures to prevent and deter sexual violence and hold perpetrators accountable. In a meeting with the Special Representative a month later, the Deputy Commander of the Rapid Support Forces acknowledged the gravity of sexual violence in the context of the armed conflict and agreed to issue a unilateral communiqué to prevent and address sexual violence, including by conducting investigations on the allegations and issuing command orders that declare zero-tolerance for sexual violence as part of upholding military discipline.

Closure of the United Nations Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in the Sudan

- The widespread insecurity has severely limited access for service providers and human rights monitoring in the Sudan. The closure of UNITAMS will further reduce the capacities of the United Nations to monitor and report cases, trends and patterns of conflict-related sexual violence and other violations of the human rights of women and girls.
- UNITAMS is in a process of transferring many of its activities and tasks to the United Nations country team, including with regard to gender equality, the rights of women and conflict-related sexual violence. With the closure of UNITAMS, gender capacity in the United Nations system in the Sudan needs to be scaled up to support Sudanese women and girls, including through dedicated capacity and financial resources. The Personal Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Sudan will support ongoing peace and mediation efforts in close coordination with international partners, such as the African Union and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development. The Personal Envoy has noted that the participation of women in peace efforts is a priority for his office and that, as part of his initial consultations, he will hold consultations with Sudanese women's organizations.

Plans to ensure that gender expertise is available for both his office and the Office of the Resident Coordinator are under way.

Recommendations

The below recommendations were made by UN-Women, as the secretariat of the Informal Expert Group, with additional observations by the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict.¹

In recent months, Security Council statements and resolutions on the Sudan have been silent on the exclusion of women from diplomatic initiatives and peace negotiations and the reports of systematic sexual violence committed by the parties to the conflict. The Security Council should:

- (a) Call on the parties to ensure the meaningful participation of women in any negotiation to bring about a comprehensive ceasefire and end the conflict; and urge Member States and regional organizations brokering the talks both to request this from the parties and to include women and gender expertise in their own mediation and facilitation teams, to ensure the inclusion of displaced women and to report to the Security Council on those efforts;
- (b) Reiterate that the full, equal and meaningful participation of Sudanese women and civil society is critical to any de-escalation efforts and to building peace in the Sudan, as well as any decisions about the future of country;
- (c) Recall the commitments made to Sudanese women in the Juba Agreement for Peace in the Sudan and the 2019 Constitutional Declaration, including with regard to the transition to civilian rule in the Sudan;²
- (d) Demand an immediate cessation of hostilities and a comprehensive ceasefire that includes sexual violence and is adequately monitored, including by women;
- (e) Call on the authorities to implement fully the 2020 Framework of Cooperation of the Sudan and the United Nations on the Prevention and Response to Sexual Violence in Conflict;
- (f) Call on the parties to cease all acts of sexual violence and gender-based crimes and to adopt time-bound commitments to prevent and address these violations and stress that sexual violence crimes will be duly investigated and that perpetrators will be held accountable;
- (g) Condemn any threats or attacks against women human rights defenders and peace activists, urge the removal of any restrictions on civic space or their right

¹ These recommendations are suggestions from United Nations participants in the meeting or from the background note prepared by the secretariat of the Informal Expert Group ahead of the meeting, and are not recommendations from the Informal Expert Group as a whole or from Council members.

² The 2019 Constitutional Declaration provides for the establishment of a peace commission, taking into account Security Council resolution [1325 \(2000\)](#) and the relevant African Union resolutions related to the participation of women at all levels of peace processes, and establishes that there should be a minimum of 40 per cent representation of women in the Legislative Council. It states that the government will protect the social, civil, political, cultural and economic rights of women, which shall be equal to those of men, and that the State will work to combat harmful customs and traditions, ensure equal pay and benefits, provide free health care to all mothers and create a women and gender equality commission, which would repeal all discriminatory laws. The 2020 peace agreement includes provisions that designate violence against women as a prohibited act; recognize male and female survivors of rape as victims of the conflict in Darfur; and aim to protect internally displaced and refugee women from all forms of harassment, exploitation and sexual- or gender-based violence.

to continue their essential work, and urge international partners to direct more resources and support to local women-led organizations and services supporting survivors of gender-based violence or women's sexual and reproductive health and rights;

(h) Request regional organizations to include the meaningful involvement of women, including displaced women, and the protection of women as central pillars of their interventions;

(i) Ensure that conflict-related sexual violence is systematically monitored and incorporated as a stand-alone criterion for targeted sanctions to deter the commission of such violence by implicated parties in the mandate of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution [1591 \(2005\)](#) concerning the Sudan and the Panel of Experts on the Sudan, and request the availability of gender and sexual and gender-based violence expertise in the Panel of Experts and the use of gender analysis in their reports;

(j) Call on the parties to the conflict to ensure unimpeded access to the independent international fact-finding mission for the Sudan with respect to monitoring and documenting human rights and international humanitarian law violations, including conflict-related sexual violence, and support the investigations by the International Criminal Court.

In addition, the Co-Chairs of the Informal Expert Group and other members of the Security Council could:

(a) Request the Secretary-General to conduct an analysis of the impact of the termination of UNITAMS on the work of the United Nations, including on civilian protection, gender equality and the protection of the rights of women in the Sudan; and put forward ideas for how to address those gaps with the support of national and international partners;

(b) Enquire as to how the work of the new Personal Envoy will ensure that women and peace and security issues are addressed, including through dedicated senior gender expertise and gender officers to support his mandate, as well as dedicated senior women and children protection advisers in line with Security Council resolutions on conflict-related sexual violence and children and armed conflict, the development of strategies or benchmarks for the participation of women in de-escalation, mediation or peacebuilding efforts, and the adequate transfer and resourcing of these functions and capacities in the work of the United Nations country team, such as monitoring and reporting on patterns and trends of conflict-related sexual violence and engaging with parties to the conflict for the prevention of such crimes;

(c) Support the production and circulation of regular gender assessments or alerts by the United Nations, to both inform donors and partners and aid the regular reporting to the Security Council on the situation in the Sudan, including disaggregated data on weapons and conflict-related sexual violence, among other issues;

(d) Increase long-term and flexible funding for women's organizations in the Sudan and in neighbouring countries, and remove administrative or bureaucratic barriers that may affect their access to funding or their ability to adapt to the new scenario or situations of displacement;

(e) Continue to invite women from civil society in the Sudan to give briefings to the Security Council in formal and informal meetings, and work with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and others to ensure that

there is a risk mitigation plan in place ahead of their engagement with the Security Council;

(f) Insist that all experts invited to speak to the Security Council on the Sudan, including from the United Nations and other international and regional organizations, incorporate gender analysis in their remarks.
